

Psychological Society of Great Britain.

(Presidential Address at the Opening of the Third Session, Nov. 2, 1876, by MR. SERJEANT COX, President.)

It is my pleasing duty to open the Third Session of this Society with a brief review of the work it has done since its last anniversary and of the prospects with which it commences the third year of its existence. I have also to report the progress which our Science has made and the most important incidents that have occurred to it during the same period of time, for in the record of the past we may trace the promise of the future.

My task will be one of almost unbroken congratulation. Our Society has good cause to be proud of the progress it has made and the position it has won. There has been a great accession to the number of its members. Increased attention has been given to its proceedings by the press and the public. The attendance at its meetings has never failed. The interest taken in them by members and visitors alike has not flagged. The papers read have been upon many subjects of the utmost interest and importance. The discussions have been animated and instructive. I believe I may assert that, with the single exception of the ever-popular Geographical Society, no Scientific Asso-

ciation in London has attracted so large and constant an attendance.

But I must begin with the dryer details of business before I touch upon more exciting topics.

During the last year twenty-seven new members have been elected and only three have resigned. Our finances—always a matter of the utmost importance in Associations such as this—are in a flourishing condition. Thanks to the prudence of the Council, and the economy of our Hon. Secretary, we have avoided the rock upon which so many other Societies have been wrecked—expenditure not absolutely necessary to existence. Especially we have escaped the printer's bill. Some complaints have been made that we do not print our papers and report our discussions. Our answer is, "We cannot afford to do so at present, and we have resolved not to run into debt for any purpose, however desirable in itself. When increased income is produced by increase of numbers, we shall be prompt to publish our sayings and doings as older and wealthier societies have done. But it is our determination to keep our necessary expenditure within our income and be content to wait for luxuries. If the progress already made be continued—and we have reason for hope that it will be accelerated—the Council will not hesitate for a moment to carry out that which they desire even more than do the members."

But something has been done by way of advance. We have found a habitation, and I think all who visit us will say that a more comfortable one could not be desired.

Papers have been contributed by many competent Psychologists on various branches of our great science, which show at least the wide and almost unexplored field of research that is opened to it. Each of these papers has contributed something to our knowledge, to which the debates that followed always made some additions. A few of those papers have been published. But not by favour. They were printed by the authors, at their own cost, and by them

liberally presented to the Society, and this course must continue to be observed for the present.

The subjects that have come under discussion during the last session have extended over a very wide area of Psychological science, whose magnitude and importance will be shown by recalling the subjects that engaged the attention of the members. I take them in the order of time. Mr. GEO. HARRIS raised a very curious question in a paper entitled "Caligraphy as a Test of Character." In fact every intelligent action of the body is an expression of a mental action, and as the mind is so must be the bodily act. Character is really indicated in every lifting of a finger—the difficulty lies in the reading of it, and tracing the precise mental characteristic with which the act is associated. But the question well deserves investigation. Two nights were occupied in debating the question of Materialism as advanced in Professor Tyndall's article in the *Fortnightly Review*. The discussion revealed great differences of conception as to the meaning of psychological terms—almost every speaker using them in a different sense. This led to a suggestion for the settlement of definitions of terms to be recognised within the Society—so that they may be understood and used by all the members in the same sense,—but without attempting to impose those definitions out of doors. The Committee has not as yet made progress with this work, but we hope soon to do so. Mr. MASSEY laid before us a report of some experiments tried by him in America with some powerful Psychics. He did not then anticipate the conspicuous part he would afterwards take at home in opposing the prosecution of one of them and in resisting the attempt of the Materialists, under a transparent pretext of protecting the public, to suppress the investigation of all psychological phenomena, because, if proved to be true, they are fatal to the theory of materialism. To Mr. TAGORE we were indebted for two very eloquent papers on "The Psychology

of the Aryans," which introduced us to some knowledge of our science as it was held by the most ancient races of the world, and faithfully transmitted to their descendants,—our fellow citizens in our Indian Empire. An animated and deeply interesting discussion was promoted by a paper on "Comparison of the Mental Faculties of Men and Animals," a question which, if followed out, cannot fail to throw great light on mental physiology generally.

Mr. Wake contributed a paper on "Consciousness," which exhibited throughout evidence of the profoundest thought on one of the most difficult and controverted questions that has engaged philosophy. Consciousness is the point at which Psychology comes into direct conflict with Materialism, and the phenomenon which the Materialists themselves are compelled to admit completely baffles them. They can, it seems, digest the notion of thought being secreted from matter, but how matter can be conscious of itself perplexes them still, as ever it will do. The problem, indeed, cannot be solved without the admission of Soul as a part of the Mechanism of Man. Again Mr. HARRIS, in a well-reasoned paper, considered the objections made to psychological phenomena and very completely disposed of them. In another paper he brought under the consideration of the Society the alleged phenomena of "Apparitions," but time did not admit of its full discussion, and the subject will probably be renewed during the present Session. There is indeed much to be said on both sides. Lastly, the Society honoured myself with admirable debates on three important psychological questions, which I ventured to submit to the members, namely: "Matter and Spirit," "The Psychology of Wit and Humour," and "The Psychology of Memory and Recollection."

This will be admitted to be a goodly list for so youthful a Society as ours. But I hope it is only a foretaste of the material that will be provided in this and future Sessions towards the advancement of the grandest Science which

the mind of Man could entertain, and the knowledge of which will so conduce to the highest interests of humanity.

The subjects brought into debate have been remarkable for the extent of their range, showing the truly enlightened spirit in which the Society has entered upon its task—which is not to advance any system, nor maintain any theory, nor promote any *ism*, nor support any foregone conclusion, but to inquire what the truth is by observation of the facts of nature. We are not teachers but learners—pupils not masters. We do not profess to promulgate a science, but to establish a science of which at present little more is known than the most elementary principles, and the facts of which are as yet almost unexplored. We acknowledge our ignorance of them. We admit frankly that the few hitherto collected are insufficient to afford a solid basis upon which to build up a Science. When Physical Science was treated by the world as Psychology has been treated until now, the Physical Sciences were as backward as is Psychological Science. So long as Scientists used the argument *à priori*—this cannot be because it is inconsistent with something we know to be true—that is impossible for it is opposed to common sense and common experience—no progress was made. It was not until this incubus was shaken off and a so-called philosophy of mere argument was abandoned for the exercise of the senses — when the terms “impossible,” “improbable,” “irrational,” employed by one party, and the scarcely less terrifying terms “sacrilegious,” “diabolical,” “supernatural,” “damnable,” shouted by another party, were treated with the contempt they deserved, that the Sciences of Astronomy, Geology, Magnetism and the rest made a leap forward and advanced with ever-growing speed along that highway of discovery and positive knowledge on which they are still progressing. It is not long ago, in the measure of a world’s life, that it was declared to be opposed to common sense and to the experience of all mankind—aye, even of

our senses—that the earth revolved round the sun ; and the man who so asserted had a narrow escape from being burned alive for his audacity. But now the whole world accepts this impossible theory, so contrary to common sense and universal experience, as an undoubted fact. Harvey was persecuted almost to death for affirming the circulation of the blood in the body. “Every man,” said his opponents, “who has ever lived knows that it is not so ; he could not have a stream running through his body at such a rate without feeling it—besides, it is contrary to the known laws of nature that a liquid should run uphill—we can prove by argument that it cannot be and common sense pronounces it impossible.” Stephenson was told by the Scientists of his time that it was impossible *à priori*, and contrary to common sense, that wheels should carry a heavy load over an iron tram at a rapid rate ; they would not bite and *could* only revolve without advancing. When the phenomena of Somnambulism were asserted within living memory, they were denied and their assertors denounced as fools or rogues, impostors or dupes, because those phenomena were strange, impossible, contrary to common sense and common experience, and Dr. Elliotson was hounded to his ruin for declaring them to be realities. And now these very phenomena, within my own memory so vehemently denounced, and for exhibiting which prosecutions were threatened and persecutions were practised without stint, are admitted by all physiologists to be true, and find their place as facts in every Treatise on Mental Physiology, and are proclaimed by learned Professors from the platform of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

This Society is established to deal with Psychological science in the same manner as Physical Science has been dealt with, and to which its astonishing progress is due—by collecting all facts bearing on it from all reliable sources, by observing and recording all alleged phenomena having relation to it ; from those facts to trace the laws by which the

human intelligence is governed—what is its structure—what its relationship to the material mechanism in and by which it is exhibited, and in what manner and to what degree it influences the external world. Surely this is a legitimate field for investigation; surely it is a work worthy of the best intellects to inquire what the mechanism of man is—what are his powers and capacities—what is that mind on which he prides himself,—if he really has the Soul he had fondly believed, until assured by the Scientists of our time that it is a superstition and a dream, and that even to look for it is to stamp you a fool and to say you have found it is to prove yourself a knave.

We have, however, this great consolation—that it is the common lot of all truths. The ordeal of truth is always and everywhere the same. Interest and vanity combine against whatever threatens the profits or the infallibility of the established chiefs of science. No weapon is deemed to be unlawful in such a warfare. The formidable rival must be suppressed at any cost. If argument will not suffice, then abuse and ridicule. If facts cannot be explained, they must be boldly denied;—if inquiry is to issue in their affirmation, it must be suppressed;—abuse and ridicule must not be spared, and, if these fail in their turn, then the police court and the gaol. It was thus in old time the priest succeeded in stamping out theological heresy. It is thus that in our own time the scientists propose to stamp out scientific heresies. The spirit is the same, the motive is the same, the dogmatism is the same, the same end is sought by the self-same means. The Inquisition flourishes still, but the Inquisitors are Professors. The only difference is that they cannot now use the thumbscrew and the faggot. But they do not scruple to exhume mouldy statutes, passed in times of ignorance, wherewith to strangle the inquiry they dread, nor to torture with abuse and ridicule and social discredit those whom they are unable to answer by refuting their facts.

Dogmatically denying the existence of soul—believing

honestly that man is wholly material—that he is merely an automaton—that his intelligence is only brain structure—that the Conscious Self is but a condition of matter—thought but a secretion of the brain—that man is nothing but the machine our senses show us—that soul is a diluted insanity—spirit a myth—and life after death an invention of priestcraft, the hostility of the Scientists to such a Society as this is readily explained. Denying the very existence of Soul, an Association that proposes to investigate the Science of Soul cannot but appear to them a ridiculous folly. “There is nothing for you to inquire into,” they say. “There is no such thing as that which your name assumes. If there be, you cannot find it, for it is imperceptible and inconceivable. You cannot grasp it, carve it, analyse it, exhibit it before the Royal Society. Until you do this Psychology can be only a sham science. We will none of it.”

But why the fierceness of wrath with which Psychology is assailed by the Scientists? What means the rage it excites? The question must have occurred often to many and we may pause for a moment to find the answer.

Enthusiasm in favour of proofs of the being of Soul is intelligible enough. It is at least a natural emotion. But an enthusiasm on behalf of materialism—an almost fanatical hope to prove soul *not to be*—a burning desire to defeat whatever tends to prove its being, to suppress inquiry and deter from investigation by appeals to prejudice and ignorance and by every unscrupulous device that the vocabulary of abuse and the letter of the law can furnish, seems utterly unintelligible. A pursuit in search of Soul might have been supposed to be at least harmless. Any proofs of it asserted to be found might have been expected to be received with respect and examined with eagerness. But the fact is otherwise. If a blight and a curse were looked for instead of that which, if it be, is the greatest prize that could be offered to laborious investigation, the howls raised against it could not be more full of malignity. Wherefore so?

Psychology, or the science of Soul, is denounced by several classes from directly opposing motives.

First are the Materialists—they who hold the faith that man is only a machine which produces the force that moves and directs itself—that Death is annihilation and the future a blank. These are the natural enemies of Psychology;—they are, and must ever be, engaged in a struggle with it of life and death, for the two principles are in direct antagonism—they cannot coexist. If one be true the other is false. If Psychology supports her claims, Materialism is extinguished. If Materialism maintains its contention, its assertion will be proved that there can be no such science as Psychology. The bitterness with which the Materialists assail the Psychologists, the contempt they pour upon them, the frantic endeavours they make to deter from the examination of any phenomena that appear to point to the being of something in man other than his mortal material structure, is thus accounted for.

The hostility of Materialism is therefore sufficiently explicable. Not so the hostility of the opposite party. At the first blush it might be supposed that Theologists at least would have welcomed with delight and hope what Materialism views with dislike and dread. Theology is built upon the assumption that man has a soul. If soul be a dream and not a reality, if Materialism be right and Psychology wrong, Theology must close its churches, banish its priests, and burn its libraries. But nevertheless, wonderful as it seems, the hostility of Theology to Psychology is in fact only second to that of Materialism.

What is the meaning of this?

The cause is clear though strange. Psychology proclaims its purpose to be to prove the existence of Soul, or rather to seek for proofs of it—not by argument or assertion, but by the evidence of facts and phenomena,—and to pursue it by the same methods and establish it on precisely the same basis as the other facts of nature. Theology objects to this

that it is an intrusion upon her province and a practical disputing of her authority. To seek for *proof* of soul as *a fact* implies that it is not to be accepted on her authority as *a dogma*. Shallow as such an argument may be, it prevails very extensively and enlists a second great array of opponents.

The third army, not so powerful, perhaps, but still far more numerous than it is thought to be, is formed of those who admit the reality of the abnormal phenomena of Insanity, Delirium, Somnambulism, and Psychism, but say that they are the product of demoniacal agency. The Insane are possessed; the Somnambulist has his wonderful super-sensuous perceptions through devils; the force displayed in Psychism is an infernal power. These opponents have at least the merit of consistency and offer a fair question for examination.

Lastly there are the mighty multitude who have no knowledge of their own, who have never witnessed anything, who have not even the capacity for judgment, who take all their opinions from others and who are wholly led by whatever may be the prevailing views of any question whatever—mere echoes—as noisy and as empty.

There is another remarkable feature of this warfare against the existence of Soul as asserted by Psychology. Not only does it unite the most opposing parties but it is conducted by them in quite a novel fashion. The usual course of Scientists is to require each to keep to his own science. If a new fact or a new theory is announced by the electrician, the geographer or the geologist would not dream of passing an opinion upon it. He would defer to the judgment of those whose study it has been. So with individuals. What sane man who knew nothing of magnetism or physiology, who had never witnessed an experiment nor learned its principles, would proclaim himself a fool by denying its facts and denouncing its theory. The chemist takes his electricity from the electrician, the

physiologist looks to the geologist for his geology—each would deem it an impertinence in the other if he were to pronounce a judgment in the branch of knowledge not his own. Strange it is, but true as strange, that this rational rule is wholly set at naught in the treatment of Psychology. Physical Scientists deem themselves competent to pronounce a dogmatic judgment upon Psychology and all that appertains to it, without having witnessed any of its phenomena and in entire ignorance of its principles and practice.

And what are the objections they have raised? They are worthy of notice only that they may be answered.

It must ever be remembered that Psychological research differs from Physical experiment in this, that the subject is not only sensitive but has *intelligence* and a *will*. The subjects of physical research are wholly at the control of the experimentalist. *He* can command his own time, place, circumstances, and impose his own conditions. Otherwise it is with the Psychologist. Time, place, circumstances and conditions are not at his command and he cannot impose his own conditions upon his subject; they must be more or less imposed upon him. The Physicists are as unable or unwilling to recognise this as they are to acknowledge a difference between organic and inorganic laws. They continually talk of imposing their own conditions upon a living intelligence as they are accustomed to impose them upon a dead earth or metal. A Physicist who has distinguished himself in the great fight now going on between Materialism and Psychology wrote thus to me, "Give me my conditions, and I will undertake to expose any number of them." He is right in this; and I will undertake to do the like with him and his colleagues. Give me my conditions and I will warrant the failure of every experiment they attempt and exhibit them to the world as apparent impostors. With a few drops of water I would easily defeat every one of Professor Tyndall's brilliant experiments at

the Royal Institution. I would not require even to go near him or to hold his hands or examine his table. I would sit in the gallery far from him and a shower of invisible spray from the syringe with which I water my plants would make him look as foolish as he would feel. Let *me* impose my conditions upon *his* experiments and I will undertake to annihilate them. As it is, the world has faith in him and his reputation would relieve *him* from suspicion of trickery and fraud. But if he were a stranger and for the first time exhibiting his marvellous experiments and asserting, contrary to common experience, that light, heat, electricity and magnetism are identical, and that he would prove them to be so by experiments performed under *his own* conditions, those experiments failing under *my* conditions, he would have been called a rogue and a vagabond, and prosecuted as an impudent impostor by rival Scientists whose theories his experiments would, if successful, have destroyed.

But this subjection of the experimentalist to conditions imposed by his subjects actually prevails with one branch of Science — Physiology. Mr. Lankester is a physiologist. He has advocated vivisection as vehemently as he opposes Psychology. He is as eager to prove that animals do not feel pain as that Man has no Soul. When he wants to dissect a living dog to view the beating heart and the quivering nerve, he must first paralyse the limited intelligence of the creature. The physician who desires to learn the functions of the human mechanism cannot do so when he pleases and how he pleases, or with any human structure he pleases—he must look for cases of abnormal action—and even then he must observe under conditions imposed by the patient and not under his own.

But what shall be said of those Scientists who deliberately pronounce a judgment upon that of which they have seen nothing and know nothing? What would *they* say if we were to do the like with them? If a Psychologist were to question the experiments of an electrician, or the dis-

coveries of physiologists, having witnessed nothing and learned nothing of either, what would not be the reproach and ridicule heaped upon his impudence and ignorance by those whose studies and experiments he had set at nought? Or, if the Psychologist had called the Physicist a fool for believing his eyes, declared him to be incompetent to observe, and charged him with *diluted insanity*?

To return from this long but not uncalled-for digression to the immediate business of the Society. It is established for more important purposes than that of a debating Club. Papers and discussions are a useful interchange of opinion by thoughtful minds. Science, however, must be based upon *facts*, or it is not Science, and these facts must be many and various, collected from many sources and stamped with a sufficient assurance of authenticity. Psychology has been so long lagging in the rear because it was based upon metaphysical abstractions and the deluding impressions of self-consciousness, instead of observation of objective phenomena, collected facts and experimental research. It was the admitted necessity for entering upon a new path and pursuing Psychology as the Physical Sciences have been so successfully pursued, that this Society owes its existence; for it is only through the machinery of a great and widely extended association that such a gathering of observed phenomena and reported experiment can be brought together.

In this work, the primary purpose of its being, the Society has made good progress. Reports of observed psychological phenomena have been publicly invited and liberally supplied from all parts of the civilised world. The reading of these is the first and perhaps the most interesting business of our meetings, precisely as in other scientific societies the objects of their investigations are exhibited. As our brother and ally "the Anthropological" displays its skulls and its battle-axes—as the Pathological shows its gangrenes and its wens; as the Entomological

in this very room produces its beetles and its humble bees ; so do we collect reports from observers everywhere (who authenticate them to us) of the facts and phenomena that are the product of the operation of one or more of the forces by which the Mechanism of Man is moved and directed : *Life—Mind—Soul*. Already there has been brought together a large body of facts that settle some disputed questions by proofs far more numerous and conclusive than those upon which Physical Science has based its axioms. I will refer to one of many ; but it is a specimen of all. The existence of super-sensuous perception—of mental perceptions by some other as yet undiscovered means than the ordinary media of the senses—is established by a mass of evidence perfectly overwhelming. Yet was this phenomenon not long ago disputed and denied, declared to be a delusion or a cheat, its believers fools and dupes and its subjects imposters or conjurers, until now we have the fact admitted by Dr. Carpenter himself and proclaimed by a learned Professor from the platform of the British Association.

We had hoped to have been enabled ere this to print the record of these collected facts ; but merely as *reports*, without comment or discussion, as material only for the future structure of our science. For the reason already stated we have been unable as yet to accomplish the design. But the contributions we have received are carefully preserved for future publication and we would earnestly entreat, not a continuance merely, but a largely increased flow, of such communications of psychical phenomena from all who may have opportunities for observation of them. Their occurrence in private families is by no means infrequent. But as they are often associated with abnormal physical conditions, there is a natural reluctance to make them known. Let me repeat that all such reports are, if desired, received and preserved in strict confidence with respect to names and places, and we require only such an authen-

tication as may be necessary to assure the Council of the genuine character of the report. For instance, it will suffice if the reporter of them to us is a person whose voucher may be accepted that the facts are as reported, without mention by him of names and localities. But where privacy is not insisted upon we should, of course, prefer the full statement. In this manner some hundreds of important psychological phenomena might be sent to us yearly for preservation in the record that must become ultimately the solid basis of *fact* upon which alone Psychological Science can be constructed for the future.

Such are the events relating to the proceedings of this Society within this room. I have now to refer to some incidents affecting Psychological Science which have occurred since the opening of our last Session. They could not be omitted from an address which is designed to be, however imperfectly, an annual review of the progress and prospects of Psychology.

The first and greatest of the events of the year was the discussion of Professor Barrett's paper before the British Association. It was a narration, by a qualified observer, of some of the phenomena of Artificial Somnambulism, notably instances of supersensuous perception. This is a great step gained, for if supersensuous perception be a fact, the conclusion is inevitable, that there is something in us having a capacity for such perception, and that something other than the material brain, which we know to work only through the material mechanism of the senses. As a Society, we have nothing to do with *isms* of any kind, nor do we venture to express, or even to form, any judgment as to the causes of the phenomena we record. On these individual members may have their own belief. But the time is not yet come for the Society to formulate theories or invent names. We must be content to go on piling up facts until a foundation has been laid broad enough and solid enough upon which to build a Science.

[An attempt is being made to determine disputed questions of science in Courts of Law. But it is not thus that Scientists should fight. The Materialists are wielding a weapon that may recoil. The Law is double-edged. In its dusty folios statutes can be found that might immesh themselves. Their anxiety to discredit every fact or phenomenon which, if established, would go far to annihilate the degrading doctrines of Materialism is sufficiently intelligible. Doubtless it is the desire and the design to discredit the authority of Barrett, Wallace, Crookes, Lindsay, Rayleigh, Huggins, Carpenter, and other members of the Royal Society who have publicly recognised the reality of some of the Psychological Phenomena as exhibited in Somnambulism and other abnormal conditions of the human mechanism. There is an eager desire to deter, by dread of popular prejudice, other persons from pursuing investigations which, if found to be true, will be fatal to many reputations. But in the name of universal Science, in the great cause of freedom of inquiry and liberty of thought, an indignant protest should be made against all endeavours to revive in this nineteenth century the practice of the Inquisition, and to seek the suppression of scientific heresies by penal laws.(a)]

We may, however, congratulate ourselves on other signs of marked progress. Investigation has been demanded by high authority and notably by the *Spectator*. It is now admitted that in many of the alleged psychological phenomena there is at least some truth that challenges inquiry. This public call for scientific examination has been already anticipated by the Society. At the close of the last Session an experimental committee was appointed, whose business it will be to examine with requisite experiment and test all alleged psychological phenomena that may

(a) This paragraph is substituted, the Oxford Union having carried a resolution to the effect that inquiry into a scientific question from which the majority dissented should be put down by penal legislation.

be submitted to the notice of the Society and to report the results of those investigations. The Committee will actively pursue its labours during the present Session.

There is no more fatal fallacy than that Truth will prevail by its own force—that it has only to be seen to be embraced. In fact, the desire for the actual truth exists in very few minds and the capacity to discern it in fewer still. When men say that they are seeking the truth, they mean that they are looking for evidence to support some prejudice or prepossession. Their beliefs are moulded to their wishes. They see all, and more than all, that seems to tell for that which they desire; they are blind as bats to whatever tells against them. The Scientists are not more exempt from this common failing than are others. As Psychologists, whose special study is the human Mind and Soul, we also must emphatically recognise that weakness of our common nature, and therefore it behoves us the more to keep watch and ward against its stealthy influence with ourselves. Individually we are all disposed to see things from our own point of view alone, to colour them with our own prepossessions and to jump at hasty conclusions that square with our preformed impressions. But *as a Society*, composed of men having a variety of conflicting views—which collectively, in its corporate capacity, can have no prejudices nor prepossessions—we may endeavour, with some confidence, to make search after the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and having found it, to proclaim it fearlessly, whether the issue of that search shall be to exalt Man to immortality or degrade him to a mollusc.



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